

Purpose and Need

Trail Re-Routes And Maintenance Project

Payson and Mesa Ranger District

Date: August 10, 2020

ID Team Leader: Angela Abel

Project Name: Trail Re-routes and Maintenance

Ranger District: Payson Ranger District (several) and Mesa Ranger District (one)

Project type: Trail Re-Route and Maintenance

Target start date: Spring of 2021 (seeking grant funding ASAP)

Target finish date: 2023

Expected NEPA Documentation Type: Categorical Exclusion (DM required)

If Categorical Exclusion, select Category: 32.2 (1) Construct reconstruct trails

Project location:

Highline Trail #31 Payson Ranger District. The legal location is Township 11N, 12N, Range 9E, 10E, 11E, 12E, 13E, and Sections 22,33,23,34,35,26,24,19,20,21,16, 15,28,27,26,35,19 ,20,6,33, 4,3,2,11.

Good Enough Trail #29 Payson Ranger District. The legal location is Township 12N, Range 9E, and Section 30.

Strawberry Trail #15 Payson Ranger District. The legal location is Township 12N, Range 9E, Sections 26, 35.

AZT-Passage 25 short reroute Payson Ranger District. The legal location is Township 11N, Range 8E, and Section 30.

AZT-Passage 22 Sunflower Area Mesa Ranger District. The legal location is Township 16N, Range 9E, and Sections 1,6,12,7,18.

Existing Condition

Many of our existing Forest Service system trails were old historic trails that we adopted into the system knowing that the current alignment was not in the best sustainable locations. These trails now often require an increased level of maintenance that both the Forest and its partners cannot keep up with. In many cases these trails, cross drainages that occur on the fall line of steep slopes, creating erosion and ruts where several major re-routes are required to create a more sustainable tread.

Desired Conditions

The Tonto NF has been working for several years with a collaborative working group for community trails called Rim Country Trails, comprised of local communities (Town of Payson and Gila County) and partner groups (Arizona Trail Association, Pine Strawberry Fuels Reduction Inc. and Volunteers for Outdoor Arizona) near Payson, Arizona. Recently, the group identified the Highline Trail (#31) as its number one priority for improvement and renovation, to serve as the anchor of its many connector and surrounding rim country trails. Over 30 miles of reroutes have been identified and laid out on the ground. Also on that priority list were reroutes for sections of the AZT and for a few trail in the Pine-Strawberry Area.

Current Management Direction

Dispersed recreation is one of the areas of management emphasis for this Management Area in the Forest Plan. Additionally, the Forest Plan provides the following direction:

- All Construction of new trails identified in Transportation O&M Plan, including necessary inspections, preconstruction activities, and contract administration.
- All O&M of entire trail system to provide for a variety of user experience levels, resource protection, and public safety. Includes trail condition surveys and maintenance plans.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to repair, re-route and maintain the proposed sections of the trails as shown on the attached maps in order to provide a more sustainable and enjoyable non-motorized trail that will serve as a launching point and a connection for recreational users (mountain bikers, hikers and equestrians) in the surrounding communities of Payson, Pine and Strawberry.

Proposed Action

This project would authorize reconstruction and maintenance of all reroutes shown on the attached maps. These re-routes would seek to move the trail to a more sustainable location providing a higher quality single track trail experience for all users groups for future generations to come. While laying out these re-routes the objective was to minimize grade as much as possible. All work will continue to align with the existing Trail Management Objectives (Class 3 trail with native surfacing and a typical tread of 18-24 inches). All work will be done in accordance with FS trail specifications.

Many sections would be best suited for both reconstruction and maintenance of using a small trail machine or best determined mechanized equipment along with hand crews. In many cases extensive drainage features will be needed that in order to be most cost effective and sustainable a small trail machine is best suited.

Following the construction of the re-routed trail sections, the former trail prism will be reclaimed in order to reduce lasting impacts to the watersheds that the Highline trail crosses. The former trail sections will be blocked to foot traffic. Compacted tread will be broken up and/or scarified by hand approximately 4 inches deep to allow native grasses, plants, and seed to take hold and

grow. In sections where appropriate, native seeds will be used to help to augment revegetation. In order to prevent further erosion on the trail bed the natural contour of the slope will be reestablished. If rills have formed within the existing trail bed small one rock structures or Zuni bowls will be installed within the existing trail bed only to arrest erosion. All trail reclamation work will follow the 0723-2806-MTDC: Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook (2007) as a guide.

As funding permits, trail bridges may be constructed where the trail crosses at Bonita Creek, Mail Creek, East Verde River, Dude Creek, Dry Dude Creek, Webber Creek, Tonto Creek, and Christopher Creek. These bridges will prevent erosion of stream banks at stream/trail crossings, improve the safety of the trail, and provide access during periods of higher runoff. Recreation staff will consult with engineering and other interested staffs for the structure design and will follow the direction outlined in Bridges and Structures (FSM 7722 and FSM 7736).

A S106 clearance has been initiated under a contract with ATA and the current partners of this project. While the company is conducting the field surveys a trail representative will accompany the archaeologist in hopes of shifting the proposed layout if possible if sites are found during the field work.

Design Features: FS Trail Specifications

Implementation Timeline: FY 21 (but we will be applying ASAP for Grant money through NFF and AZ State Parks)